

Opening Statement
Chairman Raúl M. Grijalva
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Oversight Hearing
The Impact of Climate Change on America's National Parks
April 7, 2009

The Subcommittee will now come to order.

Today our Subcommittee will be conducting the second in a series of oversight hearings to explore the role of federal lands in combating climate change. Our focus today will be the effects on our treasured national parks, some of which face serious threats to characteristic resources. It's hard to imagine Glacier National Park without glaciers, or Joshua Tree National Park without those trees. Yet the evidence is clear that we may be facing just such a future.

The impacts of climate change on our federal lands are staggering. Science shows that climate change will cause a spread of invasive species, threaten native species, endanger watersheds, cause habitat loss, and increase the intensity and length of the fire season on our public lands. Today we will be hearing more about these impacts, and suggested policy solutions, by reputable scientists such as Tom Swetnam from the University of Arizona and Rebecca Shaw of The Nature Conservancy.

There are two potential climate change solutions that the subcommittee is exploring today, as we did at a previous hearing in March that focused on national forest lands and lands owned by the Bureau of Land Management. The first is climate change adaptation. Jon Jarvis of the National Park Service will be talking about some of the steps the agency is starting to take in this regard, from scenario planning to improving what many call resilience – the ability of natural systems to respond to changing conditions. John Harja from the Western Governors' Association and some of our other witnesses will be talking about connecting habitat in order for wildlife to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

A second solution we are exploring is whether some of the key laws under the jurisdiction of the Committee on Natural Resources adequately reflect the reality of climate change. These laws include the National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA, as well as the various organic acts for the land management agencies. Today, we will be hearing from Bob Keiter of the University of Utah, who has been studying such questions for several years.

President Obama has made climate change a top issue on his agenda, and climate change and federal lands will be a key agenda item for our Subcommittee this Congress. I feel strongly that while our public lands are threatened by climate change, they are also critical in finding solutions to combat climate change. As Congress goes about developing climate change legislation, I will work to ensure that there is a role for federal lands.

I look forward to hearing from all of our witnesses today. I would now like to turn to my colleague Ms. Napolitano for any opening statement she may have.

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